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Trends. More on the Intelligence Authorization Act of 2001

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The essence of the Intelligence Authorization Act of 2001 is an attempt to support United States national and international security interests by making it a felony for a government official to disclose classified information. Controversy over whether the act would, indeed, support US security interests is exposing serious problems with the manner in which systems of classified information are conceived and implemented.

Supporters of the act contend that even the time-honored tradition of leaking classified information to journalists to shape and influence policy debates is potentially disastrous for the maintaining of security interests and must be stopped. Supporters also contend that individuals with access to classified have all formally agreed to appropriately protect this information, that this agreement is being violated without fear of retribution, and that fear of retribution and retribution itself would make a difference.

Opponents of the act contend that US security interests would be hurt without the opportunity to leak. Classified misbehavior could too easily be hidden or covered up. The viability of a representative democracy would be threatened as citizens, and their representatives, would find it too difficult to be informed about significant matters.

However, these two arguments are both subverted by the realities that much information that is classified does not need to be--from a security perspective, that some information that is not classified should be, that retribution has always been selective and even arbitrary. What is not being addressed is what really needs to be secret and what does not. (See Ball, M.A. (1994). Vacillating about Vietnam: Secrecy, duplicity, and confusion in the communication of President Kennedy and his advisors. In L. R. Frey (Ed.). *Group communication in context: Studies of natural groups* (pp. 181-198). Hillsdale, NJ, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.; Bonner, R. (November 1, 2000). News organizations ask White House to veto secrecy measure. *The New York Times*, p., A29; Feldman, S.P. (1988). Secrecy, information, and politics: An essay on organizational decision making. *Human Relations*, 41, 73-90; Sjoberg, G., Vaughan, T. R., & Williams, N. (1984). Bureaucracy as a moral Issue. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 20, 441-453; Ulin, R.C. (1986). Peasant politics and secret societies: The discourse of secrecy. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 59, 28-39.) (Keywords: Classified Intelligence, Intelligence Authorization Act of 2001, Leaking, Secrets.)